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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 SANTO DOMINGO 004990

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

DEPT FOR WHA/CAR (MCISAAC), ALSO DOL MARCIA EUGENIO, DOL
MIRELLISE VAZQUEZ

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [ELAB](#) [DR](#)

SUBJECT: DOMINICAN REPUBLIC ESCALATES EFFORTS AGAINST CHILD
LABOR

REF: A. SANTO DOMINGO 4763

[1](#)B. SANTO DOMINGO 4415

SUMMARY

[1](#)1. (U) On September 9 the Dominican Republic became the second country in Latin America to launch a US Department of Labor-funded Time Bound Program as part of an ongoing effort to eradicate the worst forms of child labor. The launch comes on the heels of an aggressive national campaign, recently announced, against commercial sexual exploitation of minors (ref A). The 3.5 million-USD Time Bound Program will target three high-risk sectors across eight provinces prone to child labor: sexual tourism, hazardous agriculture and informal urban work. By 2007, the DR plans to reduce these prioritized forms of child labor by 25%. What is most telling is the Dominican Ministry of Labor,s enthusiastic energy to take on this initiative, as well as community commitment to see it through. The Time Bound initiative follows the recent enactment of a revised Minors, Code to protect children,s human rights and a new Anti-Trafficking in Persons law that penalizes commercial sex offenders (ref B). End Summary.

USDOL BOLSTERS EFFORTS AGAINST CHILD LABOR

[1](#)2. (U) US Department of Labor (USDOL) Acting Director of International Child Labor Programs Marcia Eugenio and International Relations Specialist Mirellise Vazquez visited the Dominican Republic September 7-10 to help launch the Time Bound Program. Minister of Labor Milton Ray Guevarra, a staunch advocate of eliminating child labor, has made this a priority in domestic policy. The Ministry of Labor organized an emotionally charged ceremony that included a children,s art display and a drama, &Yes to education, no to child labor,8 performed by young girls and boys from Azua (a province where USDOL is already funding a child labor project).

[1](#)3. (U) Ambassador Hertell in his remarks underscored USG support for the fight against child labor and recognized GODR efforts to date. The DCM, Ecopol Counselor, Poloffs and USAID officers also attended. Other participants in the September 9 ceremony included USDOL partner International Labor Organization/International Program for the Elimination of Child Labor (ILO/IPEC) Director Frans Roselaers, ILO/IPEC Local Chief Technical Advisor Laetitia Dumas, President Mejia,s sister Isabel Mejia de Grullon -- who heads local NGO CONANI (National Council for Children) and DevTech Systems local contractor Dr. John Helwig. USDOL recently awarded DevTech the 3.5 million USD grant to help implement the Time Bound program, which includes an education component targeting children involved in commercial sexual exploitation, hazardous agriculture and informal urban work.

EDUCATION KEY TO CHILDREN VULNERABLE TO CHILD LABOR

[1](#)4. (U) USDOL Eugenio and Vazquez visited the tomato-producing province of Azua to promote the Time Bound Program. Approximately 20% of children in Azua who do not regularly attend school are forced to repeat a grade. Eugenio emphasized the importance of education in meetings with local community leaders. A highlight of the Azua site visit was the ribbon-cutting ceremony, attended by approximately 100 school children and teachers, opening a library in a neighborhood currently receiving USDOL assistance. The teachers appeared to be sincerely committed to keeping children in school. They told Eugenio and Vazquez that when their students fail to show up at the special classrooms funded by USDOL, the teachers personally visit parents to verify that the children are not tomato picking in the fields.

[1](#)5. (SBU) In a separate meeting with a local Habitat for Humanity affiliate, Ministry of Labor inspectors, the Azua District Director of Education, local Ministry of Agriculture officials and other community workers, Eugenio and Vazquez got a bird,s eye view of how to prevent child labor utilizing community-owned initiatives. Despite a few defensive comments from the agriculture officials (who did not want to be perceived as promoting use of child

tomato-pickers), the officials seemed willing to eradicate child labor. The local District Director of Education requested continuation of USDOL funding, without which she says her objectives will be almost impossible to achieve. Eugenio and Vazquez urged participants to seek local government assistance for micro-enterprises that target poor families. Both also emphasized the importance of changing traditional attitudes that it is acceptable for children to work to put food on the table.

COMMENT

16. (SBU) The Time Bound Program launch is the latest step in the GODR,s proactive policy to address the problem of child labor. The next challenge will be to foster teamwork between the Ministries of Labor and Education in implementing the program. Cooperation between the two ministries will become increasingly difficult in the run up to the May 2004 presidential elections, since the Minister of Labor backs President Mejia,s re-election bid and the Minister of Education/Vice-President Milagros Ortiz Bosch seeks the ruling party,s nomination. Local partners, particularly ILO/IPEC and contractor DevTech Systems, will also have to work together as a team rather than compete. Fortunately the GODR has already set the tone with other successful pilot projects, for example significantly reducing child labor in the coffee-producing province of Constanza. To sustain the momentum, officials and NGOs will have to continue to collaborate in local communities--in spite of the looming election and other distractions.

HERTELL